

HIS SOMBRE RIVALS.

By EDWARD P. ROE

AUTHOR OF "BARRIERS BURNED AWAY,"

"OPENING A CHESTNUT BURN,"

"WITHOUT A HOME," ETC.

"Now was my chance; and I reached up and seized the hand of a tall, burly Irishman."

"What the devil do you want?" he cried, and in his mad excitement was about to thrust me through for a Confederate.

"Halt!" I thundered. The familiar word of command restrained him long enough for me to secure his attention. "Would you kill a Union man?"

"Is it Union you are? What you doin' here, thin, without a uniform?"

"I showed him my badge of correspondence, and explained briefly."

"Strange as it may seem to you, he uttered a loud, jolly laugh. 'Faix, and it's a writer you are. You'll be apt to get some memmyrandums the day that you'll carry about with you till you die, and that may be in about a minnit. I'll stop long enough to give you a lift, or yez loss, rather;' and he seized poor Mayburn by the head. His excitement seemed to give him the strength of a giant, for in a moment I was released and stood erect."

"Give me a musket," I cried, "and I'll stand by you."

"Bedad, help yourself," he replied, pushing forward. "There's plenty o' fellers lyin' aroun' that has no use for them;" and he was lost in the confused advance.

"All this took place in less time than it takes to describe it, for events at that juncture were almost as swift as bullets. Lame as I was, I hobbled around briskly, and soon secured a good musket with a supply of cartridges. As with the rest, my blood was up,—don't smile, Hilland: I had been pretty cool until the murderous discharge that killed my horse—and I was soon in the front line, firing with the rest."

"Excited as I was, I saw that our position was desperate, for a heavy force of Confederates was swarming toward us. I looked around and saw that part of our men were trying to drag off the guns. This seemed the most important work; and discretion also whispered that with my bruised foot I should be captured in five minutes unless I was farther to the rear. So I took a pull at a gun; but we had made little progress before there was another great surging wave from the other direction, and our forces were swept down the hill again, I along with the rest. The confusion was fearful; the regiments with which I had been acting went all to pieces, and had no more organization than if they had been mixed up by a whirlwind."

"I was becoming too lame to walk, and found myself in a serious dilemma."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Hilland. "It was just becoming serious, eh?"

"Well, I didn't realize my lameness before; and as retreat was soon to be the order of the day, there was little prospect of my doing my share. As I was trying to extricate myself from the shattered regiments, I saw a riderless horse plunging toward me. To seize his bridle and climb into the saddle was the work of a moment; and I felt that, unlike McDowell, I was still master of the situation. Working my way out of the press and to our right, I saw that another charge for the guns by fresh troops was in progress. It seemed successful at first. The guns were retaken, but soon the same story was repeated, and a corresponding rush from the other side swept our men back."

"Would you believe it, this capture and recapture occurred several times. A single regiment even would dash for-

ward, and actually drive the Rebels back, only to lose a few moments later what they had gained. Never was there braver fighting, never worse tactics. The repeated successes of small bodies of troops proved that a compact battle line could have swept the ridge, and not only retaken the guns, but made them effective in the conflict. As it was, the two sides worried and tore each other like great dogs, governed more by the impulse and instinct of fight. The batteries were the bone between them."

"This senseless, wasteful struggle could not go on forever. That it lasted as long as it did speaks volumes in favor of the material of which our future soldiers are to be made. As I rode slowly from the line and scene of actual battle, of which I had had enough, I became disheartened. We had men in plenty,—there were thousands on every side,—but in what condition! There was no appearance of fear among the men I saw at about four p.m. (I can only guess the time, for my watch had stopped), but abundant evidence of false confidence and still more of the indifference of men who feel they have done all that should be required of them and are utterly fagged out. Multitudes, both officers and privates, were lying and lounging around waiting for their comrades to finish the ball."

"For instance, I would ask a man to what regiment he belonged, and he would tell me."

"Where is it?"

"Hanged if I know. Saw a lot of the boys awhile ago."

"Said an officer in answer to my inquiries, 'No; I don't know where the colonel is, and I don't care. After one of our charges we all adjourned like a town meeting. I'm played out; have been on my feet since one o'clock last night.'"

"These instances were characteristic of the state of affairs in certain parts of the field that I visited. Plucky or conscientious fellows would join their comrades in the fight without caring what regiment they acted with; but the majority of the great, disorganized mass did what they pleased, after the manner of a country fair, crowding in all instances around places where water could be obtained. Great numbers had thrown away their canteens and provisions, as too heavy to carry in the heat, or as impediments in action. Officers and men were mixed up promiscuously, hobnobbing and chaffing in a languid way, and talking over their experiences, as if they were neighbors at home. The most wonderful part of it all was that they had no sense of their danger and of the destruction they were inviting by their unsoldierly course."

"I tried to impress these dangers on one or two, but the reply was, 'O, hang it. The Rebels are as badly used up as we are. Don't you see things are growing more quiet? Give us a rest!'"

"By this time I had worked my way well to my right, and was on a little eminence watching our line advance, wondering at the spirit with which the fight was still maintained. Indeed, I grew hopeful once more as I saw the good work that the regiments still intact were doing. There was much truth in the remark that the Rebels were used up also, unless they had reserves of which we knew nothing. At that time we had no idea that we had been fighting not only Beauregard, but also Johnson from the Shenandoah."

"My hope was exceedingly intensified by the appearance of a long line of troops emerging from the woods on our flank and rear, for I never dreamed that they could be other than our own reinforcements. Suddenly I caught sight of a flag which I had learned to know too well. The line halted a moment, muskets were levelled, and I found myself in a perfect storm of bullets. I assure you I made a rapid change of base, for when our line turned I should be between two fires. As it was, I was cut twice in this arm while galloping away. In a few moments a battery also opened upon our flank; and it became as certain as day that a large Confederate force from some quarter had been hurled

upon the flank and rear of our exhausted forces. The belief that Johnson's army had arrived spread like wild-fire. How absurd and crude it all seems now! We had been fighting Johnson's army from the first."

"All aggressive action on our part now ceased; and as if governed by one common impulse, the army began its retreat."

"Try to realize it. Our retirement was not ordered. There were thousands to whom no order could be given unless with a voice like a thunder peal. Indeed, one may say the order was given by the thunder of that battery on our flank. It was heard throughout the field; and the army, acting as individuals or in detachments, decided to leave. To show how utterly bereft of guidance, control and judgment were our forces, I have merely to say that each man started back by exactly the same route as he came, just as a horse would do, while right before them was the Warrenton Pike, a good, straight road direct to Centreville, which was distant but little over four miles."

"This disorganized, exhausted mob was as truly in just the fatal condition for the awful contagion we call 'panic' as it would have been from improper food and other causes for some epidemic. The Greeks, who always had a reason for everything, ascribed the nameless dread, the sudden and unaccountable fear, which befalls men of manhood and reason, to the presence of a god. It is simply a latent human weakness, which certain conditions rarely fail to develop. They were all present at the close of that fatal day. I tell you frankly that I felt something of it myself, and at a time, too, when I knew I was not in the least immediate danger. To counteract it I turned and rode deliberately towards the enemy, and the emotion passed. I half believe, however, that if I had yielded, it would have carried me away like an attack of the plague. The moral of it all is, that the conditions of the disease should be guarded against."

"When it became evident that the army was uncontrollable and was leaving the field, I pressed my way to the vicinity of McDowell to see what he would do. What could he do? I never saw a man so overwhelmed with astonishment and anger. Almost to the last I believe he expected to win the day. He and his officers commanded, stormed, entreated. He might as well have tried to stop Niagara above the falls as that human life. He sent orders in all directions for a general concentration at Centreville, and then with certain of his staff galloped away. I tried to follow, but was prevented by the interposing crowd."

"I then joined a detachment of regulars and marines, who marched quietly in prompt obedience to orders; and we made our way through the disorder like a steamer through the surging waves. All the treatises on discipline that were ever written would not have been so convincing as that little oasis of organization. They marched very slowly, and often halted to cover the retreat."

"I had now seen enough on the farther bank of Bull Run, and resolved to push ahead as fast as my horse would walk to the eastern side. Moreover, my leg and wounds were becoming painful, and I was exceedingly weary. I naturally followed the route taken by Tyler and his command in coming upon and returning from the field, and crossed Bull Run some distance above the Stone Bridge. The way was so impeded by fugitives that my progress was slow, but when I at last reached the Warrenton Turnpike and proceeded toward a wretched little stream called Cub Run, I witnessed a scene that defies description."

"Throughout the entire day, and especially in the afternoon, vehicles of every description—supply waggon, ambulances, and the carriages of civilians—had been congregating in the Pike in the vicinity of Stone Bridge. When the news of the defeat reached this point, and the roar of cannon and musketry began to approach instead of recede, a general movement toward Centreville began. This soon degenerated into the

wildest panic, and the road was speedily choked by storming, cursing, terror-stricken men, who, in their furious haste, directed their own efforts to escape. It was pitiful, it was shameful, to see ambulances full of the wounded shoved to one side and left by the cowardly thieves who had galloped away on the horses. It was one long scene of wreck and ruin, through which pressed a struggling, sweating, cursing throng. Horses with their traces out, and carrying two and even three men, were urged on and over everybody that could not get out of the way. Everything was abandoned that would impede progress, and arms and property of all kinds were left as a rich harvest for the pursuing Confederates. Their cavalry hovering near, like hawks eager for the prey, made dashes here and there, as opportunity offered."

"I picked my way through the woods rather than take my chances in the road, and so my progress was slow. To make matters tenfold worse, I found when I reached the road leading to the north through the 'Big Woods,' that the head of the column that had come all the way around by Sudley's Ford, the route of the morning's march, was mingling with the masses already thronging the Pike. The confusion, the selfish, remorseless scramble to get ahead, seemed as horrible as it could be; but imagine the condition of affairs when, on reaching the vicinity of Cub Run, we found that a Rebel battery had opened upon the bridge, our only visible means of crossing. A few moments later, from a little eminence, I saw a shot take effect on a team of horses; and a heavy caisson was overturned directly in the centre of the bridge, barring all advance, while the mass of soldiers, civilians, and nondescript army followers, thus detained under fire, became perfectly wild with terror. The caisson was soon removed, and the throng rushed on."

"I had become so heart-sick, disgusted, and weary of the whole thing, that my one impulse was to reach Centreville, where I supposed we should make a stand. As I was on the north side of the Pike, I skirted up the stream with a number of others until we found a place where we could scramble across, and soon after we passed within a brigade of our troops that were thrown across the road to check the probable pursuit of the enemy."

"On reaching Centreville, we found everything in the direst confusion. Colonel Miles, who commanded the reserves at that point, was unfit for the position, and had given orders that had imperilled the entire army. It was said that the troops which had come around by Sudley's Ford had lost all their guns at Cub Run; and the fugitives arriving were demoralized to the last degree. Indeed, a large part of the army, without waiting for orders or paying heed to any one, continued their flight toward Washington. Holding the bridle of my horse, I lay down near headquarters to rest and to learn what would be done. A council of war was held, and as the result we were soon on the retreat again. The retreat, or panic-stricken flight rather, had, in fact, never ceased on the part of most of those who had been in the main battle. That they could keep up this desperate tramp was a remarkable example of human endurance when sustained by excitement, fear, or any strong emotion. The men who marched or fled on Sunday night had already been on their feet twenty-four hours, and the greater part of them had experienced the terrific strain of actual battle."

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